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**The image of the city in American literature
during the first part of the 20th century**

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Abstract

This bachelor paper examines the image of the American city in the first half of the twentieth century. It focuses on the elements such as historical background, urban development and socio-cultural aspects which helped to form the overall image of the city. Particular attention is devoted to the social and cultural factors, primarily to the minorities. These are analyzed in the practical part. Selected features are demonstrated on the city of Chicago. Furthermore, they are reflected upon in detail in the novels of the American authors Upton Sinclair – *The Jungle* and Richard Wright – *Native Son*. They are set in the literary genre of the era, and compared according to their similarities and divergences in relation to the image of the city.

Key words

United States of America; Chicago; minorities; immigration; oppression; city; social classes; housing

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá obrazem amerického města v první polovině dvacátého století. Zaměřuje se na prvky, jako například historické prostředí, městskou výstavbu a sociálně kulturní aspekty, které se podílely na utváření celkového obrazu města. Posledně zmiňovaným aspektům je věnována zvláštní pozornost, zejména menšinám, jakožto prvkům figurujícím v analýze v praktické části práce. Vybrané rysy města jsou demonstrovány na městu Chicago a blíže rozebrány v novelách amerických autorů Uptona Sinclaira – *The Jungle (Džungle)* a Richarda Wrighta – *Native Son (Syn černého lidu)*, které jsou představeny blíže, zařazeny do dobového literárního kontextu a dále porovnány dle jejich společných a odlišných rysů podoby města.

Klíčová slova

Spojené státy americké; Chicago; menšiny; přistěhovalectví; útlak; město; společenské třídy; bydlení

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century is perceived in the United States of America as the age of the city. It follows the industrial nineteenth century in which Industrial revolution increased the growth primarily in the northern and northeastern cities (such as New York or Chicago), and the industrialization gave rise to the massive urban development. Also another factor contributed significantly to the growth of the cities and that was a massive influx of immigrants which commenced already in the nineteenth century. Demands for the larger production rose and the need for new job positions lured foreigners to the United States of America and its population grew. America became a place of unlimited possibilities. However, as the production increased, the capitalist system showed its darker sides and hand in hand with that raised the consumerism; the society became materialist and the gap between the rich and poor broadened distinctly. The initial decades of the twentieth century were labeled as the Progressive Era as the reform-seeking Americans wanted to improve the newly-industrialized society

This bachelor paper deals with the era of the first half of the twentieth century. The main focus is directed towards the city. Its image is presented in several miscellaneous aspects which provide an overall outlook on the image of a city as a whole. For the closer analysis the city of Chicago was chosen as the main representative of an American city of the first half of the twentieth century as it serves as the main setting of both of the analyzed novels. The aim of this paper is to sum up the fundamental features of an American city at the outset of the twentieth century.

The work is divided into a theoretical part and a practical part. The first chapter in the theoretical part introduces the historical context of the United States of America where the growth of the predecessors of the contemporary cities began. Another chapter provides a historical development of Chicago itself. Besides that, the way the city itself was perceived is mentioned. The following chapters acquaint the reader with reasons that led to the massive urban development, whether it concerned the city's division – “*A City*”, *Perception of the City*, road network – *Transport in the City*, or the housing construction – *Housing*.

These further proceed to the chapter named *The American Society* which depicts the image of the society and social issues. In the chapter – *Social Classes* it analyzes and divides the society into individual classes and mentions their typical characteristic features. A significant role is performed by the following chapters *Immigrants* and *African Americans* as they deal with the principal problematic of the subsequently analyzed novels *The Jungle* and *Native Son* which both depict the oppressed part of the American society.

The following chapter *The Naturalists and Naturalism* is then dedicated to the literary output of the era to offer the reader a deeper insight into the nature of the two analyzed books. It compares the differences between realism and naturalism and introduces the authors whose literary output was influenced by naturalism such as Upton Sinclair and Richard Wright.

The practical part introduces the works of the socialistic writer Upton Sinclair, the author of *The Jungle*, who, through his book presents the inhuman living and unfair working conditions of the immigrants living in Chicago and the proletarian novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright, the African American representative fighting against oppression.

The final part consists of several subchapters dealing closely with the previously mentioned works. After a short introduction of the books' main contents, a comparison of the books follows to discover principal similarities and distinctions. For the detailed analysis those motives that presumably best represent the image of a city are chosen.

The further analysis concerns the leading characters of the books - Jurgis, a young healthy man of the immigrant family on whom Sinclair demonstrates the destructing influence of the capitalistic, materially oriented society, and Bigger Thomas who, put under certain circumstances, commits a crime, represents the oppressed African American society. These leading characters are further compared and examined.

Towards the end of the thesis a detailed analysis of the two novels is carried out. It consists of those motives that presumably best represent the image of the city. The chapter *Character of Housing in The Jungle and Native Son* portrays the city from a visual and architectural point of view whereas *Philanthropic Attitudes* and *Hardships of Life* rather represent the social and cultural aspects of the urban life.

2. Rise of Urban America

2.1 America – from Settlements to Cities

The continent of America lies in the western part of the world and for its rather young history it is often called the “New World” as it was discovered as late as the fifteenth century. However the first inhabitants living on this continent were Indians and their history dates back much further.

The very beginning of the settlements of the American land dates back to the year 1492 when a Spanish fleet led by Christopher Columbus reached the coastline of the continent. The following sixteenth century commenced their growth. In 1565 a first Spanish settlement, St. Augustine, was founded. This was followed several years later, in 1602, by a first British North American colony called Jamestown. The largest villages arose on the American east coast. These can be characterized as the ancestors of the cities that began to develop several decades later. (Hamby, 2007, p. 9-10)

A turning point in the American history was the “Declaration of Independence” on 4th of July 1776 that ensured liberty for the 13 American colonies that were no longer supposed to be under the rule of the British Empire and they could develop freely from that time on. The foundations of the free nation were supported by the basis of Enlightenment principles which ensured a free development of America. (Hamby, 2007, p. 61)

Then the Civil War came, which at its end resulted not only in the abolition of slavery. It was also a beginning of a new era in the history of the United States. The economic aftermaths of the Civil war were a portent of new upcoming problems and injustices that the citizens, particularly “reformers”, would have to face. The hardest task was to find the way how to preserve freedom and strengthen security, a concept that had almost a symbolic meaning for the Americans. “As black and white people set out to find the perfect balance between freedom and security in post-Civil War America, democracy faced a new test.” states Franklin in his book. (Franklin, 1974, p. 235)

The era between the Civil War and World War I., even though it was a period of less than fifty years, transformed America significantly. It changed from “a rural republic to an urban nation. The frontier vanished. Great factories and steel mills,

transcontinental railroad lines, flourishing cities, and vast agricultural holdings marked the land.” (Hamby, 2007, p. 156)

2.2 A Brief History of the City of Chicago

The earliest history of Chicago, that is the area of Chicago, dates back to the 1673 when the first European explorers settled at the mouth of the Chicago River. The first permanent citizen was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, who made the area a permanent settlement. Its position on the river allowed Chicago to maintain a strategic trading position as well as a military base called “Fort Dearborn”. In 1832 after several attacks of Native Americans the chief called “Black Hawk” was defeated and Chicago became a town in the year of 1837. The name of Chicago originated from the native inhabitants – the Indians. A great disaster struck Chicago’s fast development when it was afflicted by a “Great Fire” in 1871. “In 1850 Chicago was a town of 30,000 residents; by 1900 it boasted a population of 1,700,000.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 1) In 1909 “The Chicago plan” was designed by an architect Daniel Burnham, as the solution of a new urban building plan. (www.aviewoncities.com)

In the time of the great boom of the city in the 1920s, the growth could be seen in almost every manufacturing industry. The building industry was at its peak, the factories overproduced as they boasted sufficient working labor, and the economic wealth was also evident in the growth of financial services. When the economic crisis struck in the 1929, it had a devastating impact on the society. The unexpected downswing is delineated in the following paragraph.

Construction came to a virtual standstill, unemployment soared, local relief payments mounted, tax delinquencies rose, and discontent among the working class seemed to threaten the capitalist system. No segment of the economy was so hard as the construction industry. During the year 1926, when the 1920s building boom was at its peak, almost 43,000 residential units were erected in the city of Chicago. Seven years later, in the depths of the depression, Chicago builders produced only 137 dwelling units. (Teaford, 1993, p. 75)

In the climax of the economic crisis, the unemployment was extreme in all of the United States. However, in industrial cities, such as Chicago, the unemployment rate reached almost 30 percent. Those who kept their jobs had to settle with a fraction of the usual wage and many of the citizens of Chicago suffered below the poverty line.

(Teaford, 1993, p. 76) This complicated situation was even harder for the lowest social class and the newcomers, who did not possess any financial reserve or security as to their dwelling place.

2.3 “A City”, Perception of the City

Immediately after the first pioneers came to America, first settlements started to be organized and first towns started to grow. Migrants from Europe, England and Asia gathered in the metropolises. The diverse population resembled “a patchwork quilt” as Teaford describes it in his book. (Teaford, 1993, p. 7)

Concerning the division, every city consisted of the central part which evolved as first. The oldest part of a town or a city was called a *downtown*. The city centre, as it can be called as well, was a part where the main business concentrated. It was described as the following: “The economic nucleus of the city was the central business district.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 8) Another part was a *suburb*. This was an area located on the outskirts. It did not necessarily belong to the city, it may have stood as an autonomous part. Suburbs emerged between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as there were more sophisticated means of transport. It enabled people to move more easily from one place to another. In the west the first settlements had their own boundaries that were called the *frontiers*. Their location denoted the end of the civilized part and the beginning of the wilderness and an uninhabited area. (Keller, 1995, p. 55) A tour through the city offered a wide range of diverse sights such as neglected streets in the skid rows that were only a short way from sumptuous mansions of the city’s wealthiest families. The *neighbourhoods* were those parts of the city that indirectly divided the city into sections which formed the overall image of the city. (Teaford, 1993, p. 17)

Until the first half of the nineteenth century, the most “fashionable” place to live was the city centre. All the offices, shops, warehouses and entertainment establishments were concentrated there. Together with ample houses of the wealthy middle class inhabitants living in the centre, who had then not a long walk to their places of work,

this all created the most vivid part of the city. The poor ones lived predominantly on the outskirts until about the half of the nineteenth century. The traffic was rather weak back then, the narrow streets were sufficient for several wagons and pedestrians which constituted basically the overall composition of the traffic. Walking represented the main means of transport; the distances across the centre of the city were not long.

However, with the rising industrialization, technical innovations especially in transport and housing construction of the city, the centers began to change. Also the society was not the same as it used to be. A constant flow of new inhabitants, whether from overseas or from rural areas, changed the nature of the civic society. Gaps amongst individual classes deepened. Wealthy population was trying to develop their separated neighborhoods. Newcomers were likely to cluster and moved into so called “housing stocks” which were often neglected. The situation changed. At the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century rich people moved from the centers and the poor dwelled in the slums near the centers of the cities. Due to the permanent flow of citizens and therefore the rising demand for living quarters, the landlords used this as an opportunity to subdivide the houses and flats into smaller units, creating tenements, which were however often very run down. The local authorities nevertheless could not to keep up with the rapid growth of the cities and were not able to provide sufficient sewage systems, garbage disposal or clean water. The image of the cities at the beginning of the twentieth century evoked overcrowded, large and impersonal places where money showed its strength. No wonder that corruption and crime were rampant. (www.countriesquest.com)

At the dawn of the twentieth century the city consisted of a greatly diverse mass of humanity, wealth and poverty, sin and hypocrisy, opulence and distress which was often mistakenly thought to be part of the virtue of the politicians and their concern for the benefit of the citizens, yet in reality it served the rich politicians’ personal profits. (Teaford, 1993, p. 43) How the diverse mixture of American inhabitants of a newly settled land might have perceived the city may be apparent from Teaford’s saying: “The American city was a mass of segregated and unassimilated humanity.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 7)

There was a clear difference between the “Old” (i.e. European) and the North-American continent. Besides great influence of materialism, freedom will, vision of

financial success, imposing constructions and more eager attitude to accomplish a desired aim that would be a typical American characteristic, the clear fact is that these continents are divided by an ocean which literally separates them as two different worlds. Generally, even though a person would not agree with the first statement, the existing gap is obvious. However the gap started widening significantly as more of the immigrants were coming to the New World. The society started changing and contrasts among the society arose. The institutions such as government, educational and judicial systems had to change. (Keller, 1995, p. 16) The population growth became more obvious. The society required more products and materials for daily use and the consumption was on the rise. That went hand in hand with the waste issues and due to an imperfect sewage and garbage disposal system the cities became polluted. It was not just a problem of Chicago. As Garvin states in his book, when describing the city of Pittsburg, the situation was similar:

During the first half of the twentieth century, air pollution in downtown Pittsburgh was so serious that street lights often remained on 24 hours a day. Raw sewage polluted both river fronts. Daytime traffic congestion seriously restricted both circulation and business activity. (Garvin, 1996, p. 12)

As the number of population grew, it gave the impression of indifferent units to each other. The era affected the people's characters and made them behave more distantly to each other. An example of people's behavior is shown in the Monti's book, where he points to the situation in New York and states that people lived for years as neighbours without even knowing each other by sight. Furthermore there were but only two social classes in the city – the poor and the rich. It is noted that the middle class hardly existed there even though, in other cities, it belonged to the most numerous group of citizens. (Monti, 1999, p. 32)

2.4 Transport in the City

The transportation network in the early twentieth century gave the people of downtown more access to various parts of the city and more mobility. Cars were rather an exception in the early twenties. "For the great bulk of urban Americans, the trolley, elevated railroad, and subway were the chief means of travel within the city." (Teaford, 1993, p. 8) More specific data are provided by Jon C. Teaford in his book *The*

Twentieth-Century American City, where the writer describes the size of the transportation development at the beginning of the twentieth century: “Chicago boasted over seven hundred miles of track and almost 300 million passengers [...]” (Teaford, 1993, p. 8) For a better access the freight yards¹ were managed in the urban terminals and circling the central business district. The warehouses, wholesalers and numerous factories needed to be clustered near the railroad which delivered either finished goods or raw materials which were essential for the trade. Some huge enterprises could afford to keep their own freight yards located in the suburbs.

Freight transfers by horse-drawn wagons were expensive and as late as 1910 there were only eight hundred motor-driven trucks in all of Chicago. Therefore, proximity to the railroad lines meant transportation savings for the manufacturer and wholesaler (Teaford, 1993, p. 11)

The transport system developed greatly in larger cities. Their sophisticated system of streets and crossings produced better results in solving the situation with the increasing number of conveyances, particularly private automobiles. The automobiles offered urban dwellers new possibilities of moving around. They were no longer depending just on the public transit lines, such as trolleys, which were limited to certain destinations. (Teaford, 1993, p. 62) Apart from this, the automobiles offered a comfort which could not be provided in crowded public transport. To the most technologically advanced cities belonged New York, Chicago, Boston and Philadelphia with their highly developed and extensive transport facilities. (Teaford, 1993, p. 11) A new problem arose in case of the city centers as the narrow streets of the downtown proved incapable of absorbing constantly growing bulk of vehicles and once the motorists got through the jammed streets and loops they had to face another problem of parking. (Teaford, 1993, p. 63-64)

2.5 Housing

As previously mentioned, “the city” provided literally a startling array of sights, sounds and smells. But the way of living was the most controversial issue. Next to the bourgeois palaces of the city’s wealthiest, there were the poorest parts of the city where were people lived in slums with overcrowded flats with horrible sanitary conditions.

¹ Freight yards - a part of a railway station where cargo is stored

This situation led to a housing reform which had, unfortunately, a poor impact on improving the way of living. Paradoxically at the same time, the era of an ostentatious way of living came into being. Seemingly infinite possibilities in all respects might have given rise to a new stage of sumptuous living. Besides New York, which was undoubtedly one of the leading cities in the progressing development, Chicago also did not lose one of its leading positions. Money started to show the world its strength and the millionaires demanded a suitable living to meet their needs. The society was shifting to the northern avenues along the shore of the Lake Michigan. “Chicago’s first apartment house for millionaires opened in 1906 along Lake Shore Drive on the near north side.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 19) Despite the fact that not every city could boast of such a wealth as New York or Chicago, other cities throughout America tried to compete with them with their own versions of exclusive areas. For instance in Saint Louis, to ensure that only the rich could reside in certain privileged areas, great massive fortifications and gates marked out these territories. (Teaford, 1993, p. 19)

On the contrary the numbers of impoverished citizens, who had no overnight accommodation, were rising every year. The unfavorable situation of living in slums led to the emergence of several institutions which tried to help the less fortunate. The “City Home Association” was struggling with the problem of bad housing which was supported by the institution called “Municipal Lodging House” founded in 1901. It provided a shelter for the impoverished citizens who would otherwise have to look for asylum themselves and spend nights on the streets. After registering at the “Lodging house” an impoverished visitor bathed and retired for a one night’s stay on a stark iron bed. (Teaford, 1993, p. 32) Another possibility was the “Settlement houses” which provided rather a longer-term assistance in case of hardships. These functioned as community centers in slums, where those of the middle class society, who were willing to dedicate their free time to provide some help, volunteered to establish a certain amount of mutual understanding and to instruct their less fortunate fellow citizens from whom they could also learn back. In other words, there was an attempt “to bridge the widening gap between the middle class and the working class by making both groups aware of the concerns and merits of the other.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 31)

Another event that had a significant impact on the economical development of the country as well as on the living standards was the “Depression”² which appeared in the decade preceding the World War II. Many people were no longer able to provide for themselves a suitable way of living. Those who had the opportunity, looked for a place to live at their more fortunate relatives. The others, “who were not able to pay their rent due to foreclosing of their mortgages,” settled in “Hooverilles”³ or sought refuge on benches or under the bridges. No accessible dry place in the city remained unoccupied. (Teaford, 1993, p. 76) Many people withdrew to urban slums. During 1930s the housing reformers often criticized the bad influence of those places which worsened the health of its tenants, served as a hotbed for a long list of contagious illnesses and increased the occurrence of tuberculosis, rickets and infant mortality. In addition to that, poor housing conditions provoked violence, deteriorated morality and led to juvenile delinquency. (Teaford, 1993, p. 85) The government fought strictly against slums and strongly supported public housing, which might not have been manifestly attractive but was clean and provided a decent way of living. In 1937 Congress passed a “Wagner-Steagall Act”, creating the “United States Housing Authority (USHA)” which supported agencies in constructing low-rent housing. However, one of the USHA objectives was also to maintain the racial composition of the neighborhood. The problem was that whites who earned a considerable amount of money had the opportunity to move to a more pleasant neighborhood, whereas African Americans were, due to segregation laws, trapped in slums with no prospect of leaving. (Teaford, 1993, p. 89)

3. The American Society

Nature of the city is formed according to the type of society that lives in it and every society is shaped in compliance with the city it dwells in. The society as a whole is a cornerstone of every functioning community and its analysis reveals that it consists of many diverse groups and social classes which may be divided into various subgroups, as will subsequently be described. The image of the society is clearly

² Depression - in the United States of America began with the stock market crash in October, 1929

³ Hooverilles - camps built on the outskirts of the cities during the Great Depression; named after president Herbert Hoover who was believed to let the country to fall into depression

outlined in the following excerpt from J. P. Keller's book, where he describes the social situation in the nineteenth century: "[...] up to 14% of the work-force was unemployed and the self-respect of the Americans was shattered by social riots and street-battles." (Keller, 1995, p. 26) It follows that neither the market nor the population were prospering.

Still from all the contrasts in society of the late 1900s and the first half of the twentieth century, the most significant was the gap between the rich and the poor – in their income and assets, way of living and their social status. The gap between wealth and poverty was enormous. As it was constantly growing, it let the differences amongst the society to accentuate and led to the formation of various social classes. (Allen, 1993, p. 27)

3.1 Social Classes

As it was already mentioned, the American society varied significantly according to power and wealth. The material inequalities, however, were not the only feature of inequality. Also the authority and prestige in the society represented the significant attributes of the social status. All these factors then participated in social class division.

At the bottom of a financially secure society was a "lower class" or "lower working class". Even though it did not count as the most numerous group it probably belonged to the most distinctive, discussed and written-about group. "Working class" itself is defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as "the class of people who work for wages usually at manual labor." (www.merriam-webster.com) These people were usually engaged in manual labor for an hourly wage.

Probably the most numerous as well as divergent group was the so-called "middle class". So wide that it is often being divided into two subgroups – lower and upper middle class. Members of the middle class were such diverse specimen that they often overlapped. The ones that were on the top and sufficiently well-off so that they could lead a stress-free life with no financial problems, occupied such positions as

doctors, lawyers, dentists or accountants. The others, even though they still belonged to the middle class, might, however, face worries of being just a step away from falling to the level of working class. Otherwise, certain common characteristics were shared by all of them. “There were millions of Americans who were financially comfortable but not rich enough to pass through the social sifter and enter the front door of Mrs. Astor’s mansion. These coarser grains formed the middle class.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 20) That is how the excerpt from the book *The Twentieth-Century American City* simply and clearly defines the true nature of the middle class as a whole. The middle class was also particular about putting the emphasis on a morally and ethnically pure environment around their well-kept dwellings. They sought no “undesirable” influences in their surroundings and favored a calm style of living in the suburban streets, raising their children “away from the uglier side of urban life.” (Teaford, 1993, p. 23) In any case the middle class could be classified as the most visible and, let us say, vigorous of all.

On the other hand, the middle class, to prevent any possible social disorders, tried to impose stricter social controls on an urban-immigrant industrial working class because they were most likely susceptible to social disorder and radicalism.

Also the Progressives⁴ defined themselves, explicitly, as the middle class when expressing their common social attitude. They attempted to distinguish themselves from conservatism and aristocracy as well as from the right opposition – radicalism and proletariat⁵. This group tended to represent a general specimen of the typical American citizen. The speech of the Progressives was the speech of the American people. As opposed to the Europeans who had a tendency to differentiate according to the national types, the “middle America” resorted to the class distinctions. It was said by one of them:

“[...] to the common people after all, to the so-called middle class of our citizens, that the reformer must chiefly look for aid and support...The wealthier classes, the multi-millionaires, will not do it; the low, ignorant, and vicious cannot and should not do it.” (Keller M.,1994, p.1,3)

The position at the top of the social ladder was assumed by a group that could boast as the most financially secured. They were called the “Upper class”. Members of the group might differ in their assets or in the way they acquired their fortune, nevertheless one thing was common to all of them – they possessed enormous wealth.

⁴ Progressives – members of the political Progressive Party in the USA

⁵ Proletariat - the lower or working class

They were the so called “Robber Barons”⁶. As industrial tycoons well acquainted with the sphere they belonged to, they appropriated billions of dollars through mostly questionable methods and transactions in the years of 1870-1900. They began to merge with other companies to form more effective and competitive enterprises in order to gain a better control over the market that subsequently led to the rise of monopoly. That caused a de facto impossible competitiveness amongst the non-merged companies and allowed an immense control over the distribution, production and prices. (Keller, 1995, p. 61) As it is clearly stated in the following article, one of its members – Andrew Carnegie – possessed such an enormous wealth that his annual income was about twenty thousand times higher than an income of an average American worker.

During the year 1900 Carnegie owned 58 ½ per cent of the stock of his great steel company. That year it made a profit of 30 million dollars. Carnegie’s personal gain that year, whether or not he took it in dividends, was therefore well over 23 million dollars [...] these figures include no other income which he may have had from any other property. At the time that Carnegie was enjoying this princely income, tax free, the average annual wage of all American workers was somewhere in the neighborhood of four or five hundred dollars [...] (Allen, 1993, p. 27)

On top of that, it is essential to mention that there was no income tax to pay at that time because the income tax was introduced in American law in 1894. (Keller, 1995, p. 61)

3.2 Immigrants

The beginning of the twentieth century was predominantly an era of massive immigration that caused a considerable increase of population and forms an inherent part of the US history. “Immigrants poured into the country at such a rate that they could not be properly absorbed into the society.” (Ondryášová, 1977, p. 123-124) Despite the huge inflow of immigration, social and cultural achievements remained rather poor. The flow of the immigrants was not even. If the immigrants did not come to the few selected locations in the United States of America in spasmodic waves, they would not cause an uneven local impact but they would gradually disperse over the land and maybe they would have assimilated better, inconspicuously, into the population.

The employers welcomed the massive arrival of cheap laborers because they provided cheap labor, which gave rise to a greater competitiveness and uncertainty of

⁶ Robber Barons - American industrial or financial magnates

keeping one's job. Another reason why the employers favored the multicultural labor was that the laborers did not long for a talk during their working hours due to language differences.

The local workers began to feel uneasy about their job positions and commenced to oppose immigration. In the first decades of the twentieth century these tensions culminated and led to riots. More precisely, a few associations started to acknowledge the problems concerning the growing influx of immigrants comprising of cheap labor which had been preferred to the work of the local workers who would work for decent wages. The growing surge of discontent found its intermediaries and first public opinions were voiced. President of the "American Federation of Labor" wrote that the immigration should be limited and in 1902 a member of a "Machinists' Union" expressed the growing disillusionment of the laborers by saying: "every thinking man in the ranks of organized labor is wondering how long the United States can supply work to the illiterate hordes of Eastern Europe if they continue to come in unchecked." (Matthews, 2009, p. 5)

The discontent was present in both classes. The working class was afraid of losing jobs and lowering of wages, the middle class was concerned about the allowances going to impoverished people. This led the xenophobic American society to exert pressure on the government. All this culminated in 1917 when Congress passed an "Immigration Restriction Bill", which forbid the immigrants, who were unable to pass a literacy test, to enter the country. (Matthews, 2009, p. 4-5) It would not matter what kind of language the person was to be tested in, it depended mainly on him being able to read. As for the families, it was sufficient if one member of the married couple was literate. (Daniels, 1991, p. 278)

After the years of extensive immigration in the early twentieth century, the population centralized mainly around big cities. American cities housed a diverse body of people drawn to the metropolises by the promise of success and profit. One of the hardest tasks facing them was to gain a certain sense of belonging. No matter how many obstacles these people had to undergo, the hardest might be to finally rest in a particular spot. People could not easily pass this kind of "moral residency requirements". Their longing for acceptance and incorporating into the society left its marks of skepticism,

disillusionment and bitterness on them. It has become common to talk about these groups as “minorities”. (Monti, 1999, p. 146)

There have been rather different opinions on the immigrants’ assimilation into the existing American population. Immigrants were said to be either preserving their separate ethnical identity, which meant to differ from the local population or they would quite swiftly adopt local habits and way of living. Teaford mentions in his book that the working-class immigrant neighborhoods were ghettos where the newcomers to America were basically trapped from the beginning until the rest of their lives. As an interesting example of the way the immigrants preserved their ethnical uniqueness was a Pilsen district on the west side of Chicago which was almost entirely Czech, meaning not only the population. There were restaurants offering Czech food, Czech-language newspapers as well as church services conducted in Czech. (Teaford, 1993, p. 23, 25) However in a few subsequent pages we might find a rather contradictory image, in case of many offsprings of the immigrant families, that “they were turning their backs on their ethnic origins”. (Teaford, 1993, p. 60) It is obvious that the immigrants were to some extent affected by their new homeland, particularly the children, because they were formed by the American way of life which they adopted and had to accept to become a part of the society.

It did not take long for the social tensions to come. For many immigrants life was harsh and short. Steep growth of population density led to a rapid increase of illnesses and that resulted in a high mortality rate. Moreover, profound changes in the manners of social interaction, if any at all, began to emerge. There seemed to be no connection between people anymore. Individuals freed themselves from the traditional social institutions such as church or the family. Besides the social, even the spatial separations between classes were noticeable.

The members of these groups became increasingly aware that although they shared residency and some of the rights of citizenship in the same municipality they did not belong to a moral or cultural community. (Monti, 1999, p. 30)

What worried the social theorists and philosophers the most was that certain unpredictable changes and revolutions would gradually occur and would cause serious dissensions in the social sphere. And that what contributed to the points of tensions was the diversity of social and ethnic classes, racial groups, and, moreover widening gaps

between old and young and men and women. (Monti, 1999, p. 34-35) It is possible to say that relationships of all kinds were gradually disappearing. The society had changed.

3.3 African Americans

Just as the social conflicts emerged, a discontent with ethnic minorities appeared. Questions concerning the African American topic were never very easy to answer neither simple to solve, but now, in the time of an apparent noticeable social distance, they seemed even harder to solve. They became a social “problem”; that was, at least, how they were perceived by the white Americans, as a sort of social, racial and political “problem whose ultimate solution was elusive”. (Matthews, 2009, p. 32) Their past also contributed to the skeptical perception of African population. There was still a slight scent of their unsettled history and complications, which were yet about to happen. Their place of origin was Africa from where they were brought to America as slaves.

Radical changes were brought about by the Great Migration⁷. African Americans started moving north in greater numbers than ever before, mostly due to Reconstruction⁸ and emancipation. They hoped to find there more freedom than in the South where they had to face humiliation from the numerous population of “Negro-phobes”. These were convinced that ““the Negro” once removed from the institution of slavery, with its paternal governance and social controls, was a natural criminal.” and a vast majority agreed with the plantation supporter, Thomas Nelson Page, that the Blacks represented “the Southerner’s problem” (Matthews, 2009, p. 33)

It was not easy in the North either. They had to face insults and were most likely to be accused of criminal acts and beaten during race riots. Their places of living – segregated neighborhoods - were often targets of hate. The quality of the black neighborhood properties was sinking and the local business was in the hand of the outsiders. On the other hand, some of them had at least the right to vote and to

⁷ Great Migration - the movement of 2 million African Americans out of the Southern United States to the Midwest, Northeast and West to escape racism and to seek jobs in industrial cities during the period 1910 to 1930

⁸ Reconstruction - transformation of the Southern United States after the Civil War when the United States Congress passed four statutes known as Reconstruction Acts

participate in municipal politics in a certain way. They had access to streetcars although only in segregated parts and sometimes one might even catch a sight of a local black policeman. African American newcomers suffered severe economic hardships because they were mostly dismissed from work as the first, whereas hired as the last ones, deprived of the best jobs and good wages. (Matthews, 2009, p. 45) Those, who were shown the same amount of “work-sympathy”, were the Hispanics. (Teaford, 1993, p.78)

Rising intolerance towards the blacks was heading towards obvious solutions. For example, there was a manifestation held in 1908 in the district of the Chicago Hyde Park, organized by the “Hyde Park Protective Club”, to force the real estate agents to sell the property in white blocks to the whites only. They wanted to ensure a racially pure environment. (Teaford, 1993, p. 25)

Another were Jim Crow laws⁹ which emerged already in the nineteenth century and now the discontent public was still more frequently referring to them. Original purpose of the Jim Crow policy was that overall segregation should be established in all public facilities. In the early twentieth century, as a policy of dominating control, it was distinctly shaping the status of African Americans by harsh limitations and controls such as limiting the intermingling, restraining social intercourse or suppressing the “instincts” and “impulses” of African people. “The Negro,” the society argued,

“[...] was not (and might never be) ready for full citizenship, and should be legally confined to menial labor by an industrial color bar until such time as the race either died out or had advanced far enough to be reconsidered as members of polite society.” (Matthews, 2009, p. 32)

Another source adding to the problems of Negroes was the emergence of a movement called Ku Klux Klan. It was the “new and second-one” that emerged in 1915, founded by a poor physician’s son from Alabama, William Joseph Simons. He dreamed of reviving the order his father had served in as a former Civil War officer. In the year of founding the Klan, Simons and his partners enlisted only about a few thousand of men. Later however, in the early 1920s, the association counted over one million of members. The most surprising was the fact that the Klan was joined, unexpectedly but to the great joy of the founders, not only by the Southerners but also by men from all over the country. The aims of this movement were probably more feasible and desired

⁹ Jim Crow laws - restricted the civil rights and civil liberties of African Americans

than anyone could have expected. Their expressed disapproval did not only turn against the Blacks. Also Jews, Catholics and “evolutionists”¹⁰ turned to be persecuted. Holding the view of “pure Americanism” they stood for a pure white race, patriotism, Christianity and “old-time region”. (MacLean, 1994, p. 5)

4. The Naturalists and Naturalism

The two movements that influenced literary writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century and are evident in both books chosen in the thesis as primary literary sources are the realistic and the naturalistic movement.

The realistic movement began to flourish in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the era of the World War I. it spread across the ocean, where it reached its peak around the year 1914. In the meantime another even more important literary movement began to develop. It was called the naturalism and it dominated the American literature in the twenties. Despite originating in France it acquired certain innate specific characteristics that differed from its country of origin. Initially, naturalism emerged with the view to apply methods of social and physical sciences in literature. Theoretical basis of naturalism were laid down by Emile Zola, who followed its principles and contributed to the pioneers of the main naturalistic literary works of the nineteenth century. Literature was to observe and record life’s occurrences rather than interpreting it. (Heinley, Downs, 1973, p. 90-91)

Naturalism was influenced by the Darwin’s theory and was based on his “survival of the fittest” theory, that is to say, the theory of evolution. As Keller states in his book, its works were based “on the view that only genuinely true representations of daily life, particularly among the lower social strata, would be true refutation of the pre-Civil War romantic ideals”. Naturalists turned their attention to the class of the poorest by emphasizing that this is how the majority lives. They wanted to highlight the fact that the majority neither lives in the bourgeois palaces nor enjoys sumptuous parties. And because lives of the majority were far from those mentioned above, they directed their literary focus toward slums with unheated rooms, shelters for homeless, never-

¹⁰ Evolutionists – those that believe in the biological concept of evolution

ending lines in front of the factories, cheap bars, unfair working conditions or omnipresent shortage of food, money and healthcare. (Keller, 1995, p. 43)

Concerning the divergences and similarities of both of the movements, since naturalism comes after realism, it is considered in a way its extension, a continuation or a part of realism as it takes the same literary direction. Most critics agree that the common feature is their faithful depiction of the everyday life and the major distinctive element between these two movements is the “particular philosophical orientation” of the naturalists. (Pizer, 1993, p. 85)

However, certain attributes do differ even though they cannot be precisely defined. Naturalism is, according to what the book *Recent American Literature* states, “less interested in character and more in the conflict of social forces, and it is concerned to a greater extent with the sordid, the shocking, and the depressing aspects of existence.” (Heinley and Downs, 1973, p. 92)

And there are those that generally remained characteristic for naturalistic works. Naturalists focused primarily on the life of the lower middle class or rather a lower class, they provided a detailed depiction of the life in the slums, exploitation of the workers and the poor, uneducated and helpless characters in their every-day struggle for better living conditions, if not for mere survival. They affirmed that the powerful do control the weak ones and that their lives are filled with a wide range of inadequacies. The author assumes the position of a detached observer and a scientist, who inserts his characters into the story but then does not attempt to comment on it or influence it. They wanted the literature to be a “document of a society.” Naturalistic works were likely to lack any poetic elements and possessed only little imagery. They were at times likely to incline to socialism or radicalism in politics. Some were proponents of a proletariat. And naturalism was plainly described as the literature of both political and literary revolt. What makes the naturalistic novel so fascinating is the aesthetic effect deriving from the great divergences and contrasts. (Heinley and Downs, 1973, p. 92-94)

In Europe the position of naturalism was not regarded favorably in any way. Because of the frequent critique of the society its “repulsiveness” was slowly overshadowed by more aesthetic and avant-garde movements. However, in America thanks to its actuality and topicality it had a special appeal to the public as a way of

depicting material change and other matters that were altering the nation. (Bradbury and Ruland, 1991, p. 225-226)

There were many ways and analysis how writers and critics that appeared on the literary field defined naturalism. The conception of human helplessness against the fate's will was expressed by the philosophical statement that "we are moved about like chessmen by circumstances over which we have no control." (Pizer, 1993, p. 59) For instance Zola and his European and American followers "depicted man as an animal and civilization as a polite metaphor for the jungle." (Pizer, 1993, p. 36)

In the closing years of the nineteenth century American writers such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, with the contribution of Jack London and O. Henry, were moved by discovering the wretched lives of immigrants, slum dwellers and illegal practices and thus they began to use them in their writings. (Heinley and Downs, 1973, p. 92) One of the leading positions in the twentieth century naturalistic novels belonged to Upton Sinclair.

4.1 Upton Sinclair- The Jungle

Upton Beall Sinclair, Jr. was born on 20th September 1878 in Baltimore, Maryland. He spent most of the time of his early life in New York City where he studied at the college from which he graduated. After entering Columbia University, he began to write. In his first self-published novel the object of Sinclair's criticism was not capitalism but materialism; that was the way of reform based on personal purity, not on collective political action. Even in his first novels he foreshadowed elements of socialism that would have become one of his literary components over next decades of his writing. (Sinclair, 1985, p. vii-ix) After several unsuccessful works Sinclair met hardships when he felt his failure as a poet, writer and devotee of Art. In his book *The Journal of Arthur Stirling*, the main character's suicide represents Sinclair's self-execution of his preceding writings. He hoped to survive as a different kind of writer though. His feelings were expressed in the following excerpt:

Sinclair's imagination had betrayed him; the feverish pursuit of the cluster of false lights – Art, Beauty, Inspiration, Poetry, Love – had brought him to ruin: his marriage, romantically undertaken, had already become a nightmare; his attempts at "pure" literature had failed to

impress either publishers or the public; he was alienated from his family, virtually friendless, and living in poverty. (Sinclair, 1985, p. xi)

That might be an impulse for a new style of his next writings. After that he met with a few socialist representatives who influenced him all through the rest of his career. He found the basis and the essence for his works. He devoted his time to reading the Socialist theory which gave rise to his reaction to the strike of the workers in Chicago in *Appeal to Reason*. That provided the incentive for his next writings. He was sent to Packingtown¹¹ to gather information in connection with rotten meat unsuitable for human consumption that was sent to the army during Spanish-American war, and that would provide sufficient material for his next writing. A new movement, engaged in the investigative activity came into being. They were called the “Muckrakers”. (Sinclair, 1985, p. xv-xvi) Muckrakers were investigative authors or journalists trying to unveil illegal practices. Chicago particularly was full of them. They tried to reveal matters as they actually existed. They focused on social problems of filthy housing conditions, pervasive corruption, and hygienic deficiencies. They tried to make the public aware of these problems and turn the attention and endeavor for the improvement and change. “As one of their political breakthroughs, the “Pure Food and Drug Act” or the “Meat Inspections Act” were introduced in 1906, in the wake of the publication of Sinclair’s *The Jungle*.” (Keller, 1995, p. 28). By this groundbreaking report, or it may be said his “best novel”, he revealed the scandalous conditions in Chicago’s meat packing industry and unfair conditions of the immigrants and lower working class as well.

However, the controversy of *The Jungle* generated also a great criticism from the readers. Why the book met with such a great success is speculative and could be explained in several ways. But there are at least a few points that try to answer it. Firstly, the book dealt with serious contemporary and actual problems of the great part of America’s population. Secondly, the issue was the rising popularity and quick spread of Muckraking literature which capitalized on the strong interest of the American public which paid a lot of attention to incongruities between ideal and actual. Sinclair’s revelation of the actual that differed from the ideal extensively drew the public’s attention regardless of their role or ideological belief. The problem concerned everyone; the employee, employer or the consumer, all were involved. The “righteous” Americans

¹¹ Packingtown – Chicago’s district

needed remedy. They felt anxious about the fact that the image of the American life was somehow corrupted. Another significant point when analyzing the exceptional success of the novel is that it revealed more than any other book and even more than was common so far. Pervasive corruption, bootleg practices to the detriment of the powerless lower class supported by the urbanization and quick spread of the technology were truthfully depicted in the novel. The reason why the novel survived as a classic is obvious: it did not show the poetical side of life, and that was the thing with which the public identified. The story of an immigrant family from Lithuania, which comes to America with a vision of the American Dream¹², reveals soon that they are being drawn into the competitive capitalism and chewed up by, what Sinclair defined as “predatory greed”. (Sinclair, 1985, p. xxiv-xxv) The main character is Jurgis, a young healthy man, whose aim is to integrate into the American society, find a steady job and provide for his family. His naive efforts to succeed are unfortunately ruined by many obstacles that living in the corrupted, materially oriented society brings.

4.2 Richard Wright – Native Son

Another significant figure of the naturalistic movement, although a member of a different race, was Richard Wright, an African American author whose literary characters were burdened with the difficulties of a “black life”.

Richard Wright was born in Mississippi in 1908. Like many of the black families, his parents struggled to keep him and his brother clothed and fed and when the father left them, their financial hardships even increased. After Richard Wright reached the age of nineteen he moved to Chicago. The reason was clear. He wanted to work on a book that would depict the troublesome life of black people and, besides that, hoped to become a writer. At the same time he knew that a northern city would provide him a neutral environment free of the “Dixie”¹³ influence. The influence he actually was under was the Communist Party as he felt that only they were interested in the problematic and the unfair treatment of African-Americans. His book *Uncle Tom’s Children* however unintentionally evoked rather a sympathy and pity from white readers who felt

¹² American dream - a national ethos of the United States; a promise of the possibility of prosperity and success

¹³ Dixie – a nickname for the Southern United States

liberated from the guilt over the situation the African-Americans found themselves in. After that he decided that his following book should be more “hard and deep”. (Wright, 2000, p. x)

A topic for his intended book *Native Son* was already deep in his mind long before. *Native Son* was published in the year 1940 and immediately met with a great success. It was a first novel of a black author being chosen by “Book-of-the-Month Club”¹⁴ and sales of its copies reached hundreds of thousands. That success shot him up amongst the most famous authors in America. (Wright, 2000, p. x-xii)

Native Son is the story of a Negro boy, Bigger Thomas, whose tedious life is disrupted when he gets a job at one of the wealthiest white families in Chicago. His confused feelings bring him to unexpected series of actions when he “accidentally” kills a white girl who paradoxically sympathizes with Negroes. He encounters various difficulties from being chased by law to being captured and having to wait in a death cell for a verdict. Final scene leads Bigger to contemplation about his life.

The power of the novel lies within the dramatic racial situation in America and among two groups, the whites and the blacks. The first governs the second, which may in a simplified way characterize the book’s main topic. The aim of the book is to point to the pervasive separation of the blacks and the whites and to the unfair way the black population was treated. Nevertheless, it offers an opportunity to a black boy who is actually not able to make use of it. The author seems to treat both of the groups fairly with no prejudices. Wright tries to illustrate the lives of Negroes in the not very favorable environment which is also their country, how they find their own forms of escapism in religion, riots, crime or in search for work. Some project their hurts and longings into more poetical ways, as for example jazz or blues, some then in more practical one, alcohol.

However, even the book of such value as the *Native Son* was, did not only meet with success. Its slightly controversial topics naturally did not leave the readers emotionally unmoved. James Baldwin castigates Wright’s both novels for “reducing human complexity to stereotype”. The main point of his critique was his objection that the book gave the impression of being rather a political tract than a novel. The novel

¹⁴ Book of the Month Club - a United States mail-order book sales club that offers a new book each month to customers.

was “not dwelling upon character and letting a concern with character drive and determine the plot”. (Wright, 2000, p. xiii) Many critics who also regarded the book unfavorably agreed that the plot and the main character are too schematic and the melodramatic conclusion essentially unconvincing. (Wright, 2000, p. xiii)

5. Analysis of the Novels

Sinclair’s book is mainly concerned with the problems of immigration. The novel of Richard Wright deals with racism, specifically racial divergences. Nevertheless, both works have one substantial feature in common and it is the unfair treatment and inequitable living conditions of the minorities. These elements are to be analyzed later in the thesis. The focus was directed at the features that are similar in their nature but different in the attitude towards them and the ways they are being solved.

The question is what best reflects the image of a city in the first half of the twentieth century in these two books. What elements in a book of a Negro boy, who is unintentionally searching for the meaning of his life and the story of an immigrant family in search of the American dream, depict those the best? The aim was to discover what might the Sinclair’s book- *The Jungle* and Wright’s book- *Native son* have in common. These two seemingly diverse books’ characteristics seem to be dissimilar in their origin; however, they are alike in terms of, for instance, living conditions. The main conflict in both books remains the same: clash of ethnicities, separation, limitations, restrictions and racism. The Wright’s book even refers to “white God and black God”. (Wright, 2000, p. 5)

When analyzing books *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair and *The Native Son* by Richard Wright, the reader realizes how many factors they have paradoxically in common, although they are two thematically diverse writings. The following subchapter first analyses the common features of both novels portraying the image of the Chicago city and furthermore compares the particular way of dealing with them. The analysis detects the diverse aspects in perspective of a particular context and role in the book.

Despite the fact that both of the novels are ranked among the leading naturalistic novels, and therefore deal with delicate social, political and economical situation of the United States of America, some of the conflicts originate in different contexts.

5.1 Character of Housing in The Jungle and Native Son

What strikes the readers' attention first is the visual image of a city. In this part the emphasis is put largely on the appearance of the houses that could be found in the city of Chicago and on the way they vary according to a social stratification. No matter what kind of a city, it is chiefly represented by its architecture and its buildings. As it was closely outlined in the chapter *Housing* in the theoretical part, the city offered an astonishing image of living. Buildings of the upper class were pompous, those of the lower working class mostly consisted of several single apartments which were inhabited by several different families. These dwellings of the lower class, that play a major part in both novels of Sinclair and Wright, were in no way sumptuous. They were situated mostly in largely neglected suburban areas and were adjusted to the economical, i.e. modest needs, of the working class in an effort to accommodate as many people as possible.

Comparing the immigrant and the African-American families to find out what affected their way of living one finds them rather similar in their social background. Firstly, they did not dispose of any substantial financial means. Therefore, the only possible way of living for them was to rent a house and pay for it on a monthly basis. In case of the Lithuanian immigrants it was also a non-material base resulting from their arriving in Chicago only with a few personal items, leaving all their belongings in their motherland. They were coming to America to start a new life from the very beginning. They did not possess any tangible property, just a few necessary personal items. And precisely for this type of people the so called "boarding houses" existed. Rather than a house, as the title implies, they were flats in each building that served foreign immigrants. No matter how the "boarding house" might have sounded to a newcomer, this place was unthinkable filthy. The following excerpt offers a quick view of what kind of living conditions welcomed the newly arrived citizens:

Some of these places were kept by private persons, some were cooperative. There would be an average of half a dozen boarders to each room – sometimes there were thirteen or fourteen to one room, fifty or sixty to a flat. Each one of the occupants furnished his own accommodations – that

is, a mattress and some bedding. The mattresses would be spread upon the floor in rows – and there would be nothing else in the place except a stove. It was by no means unusual for two men to own the same mattress in common, one working by day and using it by night and the other working at night and using it in the day-time. Very frequently the lodging-house keeper would rent the same beds to double shifts of men. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 34)

Such conditions of living were obviously hard to endure by families with children, elderly or sick people. Such places could have scarcely been kept tidy because of the permanent flow of too many and quickly changing inhabitants and also terrible hygienic conditions prevailing there.

In *Native Son* the very beginning of the book offers an insight into a Negro family dwelling where the main protagonist - Bigger Thomas - lives with his mother and siblings. They inhabit a one-room flat with two old iron beds and a bare floor. Their furniture consists merely of ordinary pieces such as a table with four chairs and an old dresser. A room that served as a kitchen was often either shared by more families or it was a very simple kitchenette with basic equipment for just one family, which is an example from the Wright's novel. (Wright, 2000, p. 134-135) It is evident that such a lack of space did not offer much comfort. The overcrowded place occupied by people of both sexes was even more apparent when women wanted to change their clothes. Men were asked to turn their backs not to see them. "Turn your heads so I can dress" ordered mother to her sons. (Wright, 2000, p. 33-34) Due to the lack of privacy there was no other way of solving the clothes changing. It must be reminded that it was the beginning of the twentieth century when people were much more morally restricted than nowadays.

Comparing these housing conditions to Sinclair's description of his immigrant character's accommodation there is not much difference. None of them disposed of a private room and their furnishings were very plain. However, as the plot unfolds the Lithuanian family decides to buy a family house which would be occupied only by them and their close relatives. They buy a house on hire purchase which brings them many financial hardships. Besides, no matter how hard their living conditions might have been, it all even worsened with severe winters of Chicago. Only one room was heated, and just to the necessary temperature to satisfy the basic needs of survival. Moreover, they are deceived by the real estate company later on. Apart from the fact that the house was poorly built, they have to pay higher installments than expected as the contract is

full of hidden costs. They discover what deception they were involved in when an old compatriot, Grandmother Majauszkiene, reveals the truth to them, based on her own experience:

In the first place as to the house they had bought, it was not new at all, as they had supposed; it was about fifteen years old, and there was nothing new upon it but the paint, which was so bad that it needed to be put on new every year or two. The house was one of a whole row that was built by a company which existed to make money by swindling poor people. The family had paid fifteen hundred dollars for it, and it had not cost the builders five hundred when it was new [...] They used the very flimsiest and cheapest material; they built the houses a dozen at a time, and they cared about nothing at all except the outside shine. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 81)

Sadly, their inexperience finally leads to the loss of the house and to significant financial and emotional damage.

Considering the terrible sanitary situation of Chicago at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not surprising that sometimes rats would be seen in a flat of lower class people. Wright himself recalls in the introduction of his book that Chicago was literally infested with rats and that he had seen many of them on the streets. He adds stories of children being bitten by them in beds (Wright, 2000, p. 29), which was probably another reason why he included the element of rats in his book. The first such incident comes in the beginning of the book, which is set in the flat of Bigger's family. "A huge black rat squealed and leaped at Bigger's trouser-leg and snagged it in his teeth, hanging on." (Wright, 2000, p. 35) and then a long, stressful and dangerous hunt for killing it began.

Sinclair also mentions the rats, whether comparing the sealed American immigrants' fate to them "they were like rats in a trap, that was the truth" (Sinclair, 1985, p. 83) or when revealing a dreadful death of one of the members of the Lithuanian family. The image of a child being eaten by the furious rodents leaves deep grief and feeling of helplessness in Jurgis when he discovers it. "Now and then he would quiver with a sudden spasm of horror, at the picture of little Stanislovas shut up in the deserted building and fighting for his life with the rats!" (Sinclair, 1985, p. 350) Rats unfortunately find their place in the book again. The writer describes that they were poisoned at the slaughterhouse and then simply mixed together with other ingredients from which the renowned meat products were made. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 163)

Regarding the previously mentioned situation, the poorly equipped dwellings or the dreadful rat problems, how inconceivably might the houses of the wealthiest barons in Chicago, which were more like medieval castles, seem. Jurgis, Sinclair's protagonist, had the opportunity to visit one of them by coincidence; a vast hall inside the building was surrounded by pillars, marble floor, walls with enormous paintings, statues and flowers. A huge dining room with a fountain was full of luxurious furniture where a piece of chair cost thousands of dollars and a single painting several thousands. There were sofas and lounging-chairs with soft pillows and apart from all that there was a swimming pool worth several thousand dollars. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 284-288) Such a discovery must have affected the character profoundly.

The standards of living changed substantially hand in hand with financial situation and social status of the citizens. There is no wonder that classes financially better off than the lower working class occupied the types of dwellings that had little in common with those of black and immigrant families, mentioned previously. Another example of housing is to be seen in Dalton's house where the main protagonist, Bigger, comes to apply for a job of a chauffeur. The residences of the rich consisted of more than one floor with one central hall – a saloon, interconnected with other spacious rooms. A single room for each person was commonplace. Richard Wright wrote: "each person lived in one room and had a little world of his own." (Wright, 2000, p. 165) Services of a housekeeper, a maid or a driver were a must and these lived in the house and possessed a room of their own as well. No wonder that Bigger's discovery, that his room at Daltons' is much better equipped than the one at home, irritated him. "He hated his room and all the people in it, including himself." (Wright, 2000, p. 135)

5.2 Philanthropic Attitudes

Native son, however, reveals quite a paradoxical discovery as the plot unfolds. It is that Mr. Dalton, a wealthy real estate baron, who makes rich donations to Negro population, is the owner of "South Side Real Estate Company". Thus he manages this kind of buildings in the predominantly black area of South Side, with the overpriced

one-room rat-infested flats where Bigger lives. He realizes that Mr. Dalton is therefore no more any exception and his hatred, fear and anger toward the whites persists:

Mr. Dalton was somewhere far away, high up, distant, like a god. He owned property all over the Black Belt, and he owned property where white folks lived, too. But Bigger could not live in a building across the "line". Even though Mr. Dalton gave millions of dollars for Negro education, he would rent houses to Negroes only in this prescribed area, this corner of the city tumbling down from rot. (Wright, 2000, p. 204)

The society regarded the Daltons as philanthropists, supporting and standing up for blacks' rights and thus they were beyond blame for any wrongdoings. However, neither the society nor the Daltons themselves apparently realized that giving a part of their money away is just an unconscious way of mitigating the feeling of guilt for exploiting poor Negro inhabitants. And that is the characteristic nature of a shallow society motivated by racial prejudices.

Wright also presents his own feelings and thoughts, at this point not reflected through the character of Bigger. He, being once employed at "South Side Boy's Club", an institution which provided a reasonable spending of spare time for the Negro boys (whom he universally calls Biggers) by playing baseball, marbles and other activities, summarizes in the following excerpt, what he realized as being the reason of the racially motivated society's philanthropic deeds towards blacks:

Here (South Side Boy's Club) I felt for the first time that the rich folk who were paying my wages did not really give a good goddamn about Bigger, that their kindness was prompted at bottom by a selfish motive. They were paying me to distract Bigger with ping-pong [...] in order that he might not roam the streets and harm the valuable white property which adjoined the Black Belt. (Wright, 2000, p. 22)

This statement, no matter how exaggerated it might seem, is however based upon a truthful testimony of an intelligent man who tries to maintain an unbiased stance. As he wrote, he felt that a more profound right than that of politics or race, is the human right and that is "the right of a man to think and feel honestly." (Wright, 2000, p. 18)

The book "From Slavery to Freedom" also mentions philanthropic deeds of rich white people, however appraises them from a general point of view as elements that may be beneficial for both blacks and whites. As an example it mentions the cases of several influential white persons, such as John D. Rockefeller, who richly financed black education by donating millions of dollars. The reason for supporting precisely

educational foundations was that “these agencies hoped to establish the principle of self-help for the individual as well as for the state”. (Franklin, 1974, p. 280)

5.3 Analysis of the Leading Characters

Both novels dispose of a wide range of characters who are in a way involved in the plot of the novels and considerably influence its action. However, the following chapter is dedicated to the profound analysis of the leading characters of Jurgis - as the most distinctive figure of the Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, and Bigger Thomas who as the *Native Son* represents the book of Richard Wright.

A Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis is coming with his family to the United States of America with a vision of the American dream. He did so, like many Europeans before him who tried to make their fortune in a country of which “people dreamed” and left their origin behind to start anew. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 29) Jurgis is a great example of an easygoing youth. He is a strong and healthy young man, a positive, righteous, of a basically flawless character who is willing to work hard to fulfill his dreams of living a happy and content life in America. The family bonds are very strong and he is ready to sacrifice maximum for his relatives. The reader does not know what education he gained, however, growing up in a village probably did not offer a boy who “had never seen a city, and scarcely even a fair-sized town” much education. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 28) He is used to manual work. After arriving in Chicago he immediately starts searching for a job. Although the work at the slaughterhouse is very exhausting, his desire to learn better English in order to understand political matters leads him to the night school which he attends with eagerness. Sadly, his workload often makes his attendance impossible. His character and state of health changes for the worse due to too many hardships he had to go through, that are caused predominantly by deceitful behavior of the society, corrupted establishment and unfair working and living conditions. In the end he finds a consolation in socialism as the opposite of capitalism that made his life wretched.

Bigger is a native twenty-year old American black boy who finished his studies in the eight grade and since then he does not have a serious job, if any. He lives with his family in a one-room apartment in the South Side of Chicago. Just as in the previous case the shortage of money is omnipresent. He is depicted as a boy who is affected by a pervasive feeling of oppression from white side of population which, as a collective universal evil, is the reason of all Bigger's misfortunes. He expresses his attitude by calling them universally as "the white folks" and saying that "they don't let us do nothing." (Wright, 2000, p. 58) His fear of life and of the power of the white population is disguised behind a mask of a tough guy which is often transformed into anger. In his complaints towards unattainable aims that he can not reach either due to his resentment or prevalent racial prejudices, he always includes the white race as the reason for his failings.

However, as it is revealed later on, it is apparent that he is aware of the fact that being in dire straits might be to a considerable extent the fault of the Negroes themselves. As he once returns home after seeing the Daltons' house, he starts to think about what the reasons of the Negroes' hardships are:

Why did he and his folks have to live like this? What had they ever done? Perhaps they had not done anything. Maybe they had to live this way precisely because none of them in all their lives had ever done anything, right or wrong, that mattered much. (Wright, 2000, p. 135)

He is rather ashamed by the family's shortage of money. As opposed to him, Jurgis constantly attempts to solve financial problems of his family by saying "I will work harder." (Sinclair, 1985, p. 87) Bigger does not seem to find it necessary to work and looks for reasons to avoid it. That seems weird as Bigger finds himself constantly without any money and he has to be pushed to take the job at Daltons' which his mother found for him. His general disinterest and negative attitude worries his mother greatly. His having a job would also financially help the family which was struggling for every cent. His mother's desperate comments "we wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you" he passes almost indifferently. (Wright, 2000, p. 38) He actually feels that it is his hopelessness and inability that led him to his general resistance. "He hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them." (Wright, 2000, p. 40) but he never actually admits this fact. He postpones applying for a job at Daltons' indefinitely while Jurgis, who

immediately looks for a job and finally finds one, is immensely happy: “His whole soul was dancing with joy – he was at work at last! He was at work and earning money!” (Sinclair, 1985, p. 53)

5.4 Hardships of Life

When the developers of Chicago tried to unify the city which would ensure at least the minimal standards of morality, tolerance and quality living among local residents and neighbors, they did not realize that these unstable tensions between poor and rich, black and white and foreign-born and native would, after the World War I, widen even more. The most evident was the decline of morals. In 1920 the “Prohibition Amendment” came into force but the failure of the reform was evident and the post-war era offered a new scope for crime. Booze and prostitution flourished in the saloons and chief gangsters built up their powerful empires that answered the demand sufficiently and were practically impossible to defeat. Due to these practices Chicago became well known in the field of crime. (Teaford, 1993, p. 44) Poor living conditions forced people to search for ways of escapism which would at least for a while relieve them from the burden of life. Such was the alcohol. The situation that led the two characters of Jurgis and Bigger to drinking was in each case quite different. Bigger gladly uses any stressful situation as a reason to drink. When analyzing Jurgis, the matters are different. At the beginning of the book he hardly drinks any alcohol. After his arrival in America, his main concern is to have enough work to provide for his family. However, as the plot progresses, he encounters so many hardships that he is no longer able to tolerate those wretched living conditions. He loses his optimistic view and begins to feel the unfair wickedness of the society bitterly. He looks for ways to escape and he finds them in alcohol. The objective here is to find out what leads such a positive, hardworking, righteous character such as Jurgis to alcohol for which he spends his hard-earned money. There are more factors involved.

Firstly, the severe Chicagooan winters with piles of snow often made it impossible to get to work. Sometimes even public transport stopped to work. Then it was up to the people to get to their destinations by walking. And that was, due to the ubiquitous piles of snow and frequent blizzards, almost impossible. Even one absence

almost definitely meant loss of work and the people of the Packingtown were aware of that. This period of time was an every-day fight for survival: “the whole district braced itself for the struggle that was an agony, and those whose time was come died off in hordes.” (Sinclair, 1985, p. 96) The winters would be definitely better tolerated if the citizens had more money to spend on warmer clothing but they hardly managed on their income in summer, let alone in winter. They would wrap up in whatever they had but, as it is described, “they could not wrap up against exhaustion; and many a man gave out in these battles with the snowdrifts, and lay down and fell asleep.” (Sinclair, 1985, p.97) The citizens of Packingtown could bravely struggle with the hardships of their life but they could never win against the power of nature.

Secondly, there were the terrible working conditions in which the employees of the slaughterhouse had to work in. There was no heat so it was like working in a room without doors. As Sinclair describes it, employees would wrap up their feet soaked in blood in newspapers or sacks to prevent them from freezing, a little at least. All those using the knives had bare hands which were covered with frost and grew numb and were likely to be injured. (Sinclair, 1985, p. 98)

However, all those inconveniences might have been endured if there would have been one thing – a place where they might eat, adds Sinclair. “Jurgis had either to eat his dinner amid the stench in which he had worked, or else rush, as did all his companions, to any one of the hundreds of liquor stores which stretched their arms to him.” (Sinclair, 1985, p. 99) Obviously, there was basically no chance to avoid saloons which, full of alcoholic beverages, warmly welcomed their guests like an oasis, serving tasty hot meals in the midst of a harsh Chicagoan winter. There was only one requirement – the guest had to drink. And that is how Jurgis got slowly used to drinking which in fact became the brightest moment of his days because his cold home was no longer a place of happiness.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of the thesis was to provide a coherent portrayal of the American city at the beginning of the twentieth century. The topic covered the historical context of the era, the formation and development of cities and their overall visual image. Besides, the aim was to depict the social and cultural aspects of the urban life and changes that affected the lives of the American citizens. It tried to elevate the conception of the city, as a foundation of civilization; the city became an assortment of clashing social, ethnic and language groups.

The city of Chicago was chosen as the main representative to illustrate the particular example of the “city“, and, as it plays a crucial part in both analyzed novels, it therefore serves as a device to demonstrate its features practically. The theoretical analysis was based upon the novels of Upton Sinclair - *The Jungle* and Richard Wright - *Native Son*. Time-wise the thesis was directed towards the earlier decades of the twentieth century, as both of the analyzed novels take place in early years of the twentieth century.

The first chapter introduced the historical background of the United States of America, where the first forerunners of the contemporary cities began to appear. Providing an introduction for the examined topic, the chapter mentioned the first settlements in America and historical points which somehow significantly influenced the happenings concerned with the later urban development.

The next chapter then focused more specifically on a particular city, namely on the city of Chicago for hardly any other city became so diverse. An overall summary of the city’s development and history was provided. As Chicago belongs to the biggest and fastest industrially growing cities, it became a perfect representative of “the city”, and as it was mentioned, it served as a suitable setting where both of the analyzed novels take place. Therefore it could be used for the detailed illustration of the city’s elements.

The following chapters introduced subsequent elements that participated in forming the overall image of the city of the twentieth century. “A City”, *Perception of the city* was a chapter that examined the impressions the city gave. The architectural point of view was provided and further paragraphs offered a viewpoint of the social stratification through the critical opinions of the authors of the secondary literature. It

introduced a simplified description of the city's set-up and explanation of the key terms such as *frontiers*, *downtown* and *neighborhood*, which helped to comprehend the basic structure of the city. However, the fragmentation of the metropolises often encouraged to a certain deal of elitism. To be more specific, while the affluent white population moved to the racially "pure" suburban areas, the least affluent citizens inhabited the centers that turned into slums with poor hygienic conditions. The reasons why there was such a rapid growth of demoralization were briefly summarized and the ways that tried to maintain at least a certain level of morality were introduced. Chapters *Transport in the City* and *Housing* conclude this part of the thesis dealing with the image of the city from the constructional point of view.

The chapter *The American Society* dealt with the social issues. It introduced the society as the cornerstone of every functioning community, as it significantly influenced all the happenings within the city. It also showed how the society gradually separated into upper, middle and lower class and each one of them is characterized. The lower class stood at the bottom of the social scale and held the worst paid jobs. The standards of their living were not high in any way and they often struggled for a daily survival. It was remarked that the middle class was the most heterogeneous as it consisted of a wide range of diversely affluent citizens. It is necessary to mention, that the boundary between the lower and the middle class was not very distinct and that those on the verge of the middle class could fall one level down almost anytime. The top rank belonged to the upper class. Those were the most comfortably well-off people with a great political power. However, the gaps between the individual classes widened gradually and the society became alienated. The city of such great variety affected its citizens. The citizen was no longer judged by his merits or character but according to his wealth. Especially in Chicago the decline of moral values became an overriding problem not only for the society but also for the whole city itself.

The following chapters *Immigrants* and *African Americans* basically dealt with the overall problem of oppression towards the minorities whether they were represented by immigrants or African American population. This chapter's attempt was to introduce the unfair conditions that the minorities were put through and the everyday oppression from the side of employers, powerful individuals or racially biased society. It also

presented how they, by being basically singled out from the society, were compelled to make their own “cities” which then often turned into ghettos.

The chapter *The Naturalists and Naturalism* offered an insight into the literary output of the era as well as the nature of the literary movements that significantly influenced the two naturalistic novels that are analyzed further in the thesis. The subsequent aim was to compare the differences and similarities between realism and naturalism, their historical background and the way they developed. The main representatives were introduced, as well as the authors, influenced by this literary movement, such as Upton Sinclair and Richard Wright, and the end of this chapter deals with the practical analysis.

The practical part demonstrated the acquired theoretical knowledge on exact examples from the two chosen novels *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair and *Native Son* by Richard Wright. To summarize the similarities, the story of both of these novels is demonstrated in the oppressed citizens of Chicago. That is why they are suitable as an effective tool for the practical illustration of the previously mentioned elements that formed the image of an American city of the first half of the twentieth century. Since the chosen novels are somewhat controversial in their nature as they deal with a certain problematic issues of the society, they were closely examined and other authors’ literary criticism was taken into consideration.

In the following subchapters, the characteristic features of the two novels were compared. The paper tried to find what their principal similarities and differences are. These, considered to have significantly contributed to the forming of the frame of the city’s image, were identified and analyzed. However, it was not possible to cover the whole range of the issues. The analysis focused primarily on *Character of Housing in The Jungle and Native Son* which compared the dwellings of the novel’s leading characters and discovered that these were rather similar and the prevailing lack of privacy and bad living conditions were alike.

The chapter *Philanthropic Attitudes* then reveals quite an unforeseen discovery which refutes the conjecture that a wealthy family, the Daltons, selflessly provided donations to the Negro population. As the plot proceeded, it was discovered, that the Daltons own the overpriced wretched slum on the South Side where the Negro citizens

were forced to live. This controversy shows the hypocrisy and, basically, charity-for-effect-like behavior.

Further in the thesis the leading characters of the two novels were dealt with in detail in the chapter *Analysis of the Main Characters*, their distinct personalities were compared and concrete examples provided. The analyzed topics include different approaches to work or to alcohol, as they are described in the chapter *Hardships of Life*; this chapter also concludes the bachelor paper.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá obdobím první poloviny dvacátého století ve Spojených státech amerických. Cílem je prezentace historických a kulturních souvislostí, které podpořily růst a rozvoj měst, a popis obrazu města Chicaga v tomto období, s využitím sekundární literatury. Teoretická část je zaměřena zejména na problematiku komplikované situace národnostních a etnických menšin, jejich pozici na okraji společnosti a podrobnosti jejich každodenního života, zejména bydlení, přepravy a zaměstnání. Praktická část přibližuje dvě literární díla, *The Jungle* od Uptona Sinclaira a *Native Son* od Richarda Wrighta, jejichž děj a tematika s obdobím první poloviny dvacátého století v Chicagu úzce souvisí, analyzuje hlavní postavy obou knih, a teoretické poznatky dokládá konkrétními příklady a úryvky z těchto děl.

S objevením Ameriky evropskými mořeplavci se začala psát historie takzvaného „Nového Světa“. Tyto události během šestnáctého století započaly zásadní změny v osidlování Spojených států amerických. Rapidní nárůst populace byla zapříčiněna množstvím přistěhovalců z evropských a jejich domestikací především podél severoamerického východního pobřeží. Růst a zalidňování měst skýtalo pohled na pestrou směsici národností, etnik a společenských vrstev. V období do poloviny devatenáctého století, kdy nebyl obyvatelům velkých měst k dispozici žádný dopravní systém, bylo centrum města koncentrací obchodů, podnikání i zábavy. Důsledkem těchto souvislostí se i sídla nejbohatší vrstvy soustředila do středu měst a nejnižší společenská vrstva se soustředila do okrajových čtvrtí.

Na začátku dvacátého století byly osobní automobily v ulicích k vidění jen sporadicky a obyvatelé velkých měst se museli spoléhat na veřejnou dopravu. S rozvojem automobilového průmyslu a dopravy se situace obrátila. Bohatí občané začali budovat nové exkluzivní čtvrti dále od středu měst. Poblíž průmyslových center naopak vznikaly slumy a celé oblasti, kde se soustředili čerství přistěhovalci. V těchto chudinských čtvrtích obyvatelé trpěli děsivými životními podmínkami, špínou a zimou, a velmi často i vykořisťováním ze stran pronajímatelů, kteří zneužívali jazykové bariéry i finanční negramotnosti většiny imigrantů. Podrobnému popisu rozdělení města na

centrum, zvané *downtown*, pompézní rezidenční i chudinské čtvrti, a linie zvané *frontiers*, které tyto striktně oddělovaly, je věnována celá kapitola.

Město Chicago bylo při ústí řeky stejnojmenného názvu založeno prvními osadníky v roce 1673 a ze své strategické pozice mohlo těžit v nespočtu ohledů. Během padesátiletého období od roku 1850 do roku 1900 se počet jeho obyvatel rozrostl z 30.000 na 1.700.000, což znamenalo nutnost upravit městské uspořádání po stavební stránce. Značný kontrast mezi luxusními domy nejbohatší vrstvy a nuzného bydlení nejnižší vrstvy obyvatel se snažila změnit „reforma bydlení“. Ta ovšem skončila neúspěchem a rozdílly se staly ještě markantnějšími. Hroživou situaci nejchudších obyvatel se snažila vyřešit v roce 1901 nově vzniklá instituce zvaná „Municipal Lodging House“, která pomáhala lidem bez domova či jakékoliv jiné možnosti byt' krátkodobého ubytování.

Značně kontrastně působí obraz města Chicaga v první polovině dvacátého století, když je představováno jako země škály odlišných kultur, byrokracie, krutého kapitalismu, nečestných praktik, vysoké konkurence pracovní síly a třídního boje a útisku nejchudší třídy.

Období první poloviny dvacátého století bylo označováno jako éra města. Zatímco ve dvacátých letech zažíval průmysl a stavebnictví období největšího rozkvětu, ekonomická krize v roce 1929 znamenala strmý pád. Kvůli provázanosti byla zasažena snad všechna odvětví tohoto průmyslového města. Propad poptávky znamenal výrazný propad výroby, továrny propouštěly zaměstnance, a i ti, kteří si svou práci udrželi, museli sledovat značný pokles svých mezd. Vlivem těchto okolností se množství obyvatel Chicaga ocitlo na hranici bídy, a to i kvůli nulovým úsporám či nejistoty bydlení jako takového.

Americké společnosti byla věnována pozornost především v druhé, teoretické části. Zde bylo cílem představit sociální a kulturní aspekty městského života, které ovlivňovaly každodenní život americké společnosti.

V průběhu devatenáctého století se v oblasti literatury se rozvinuly dva směry, a to realismus a naturalismus. Realismus se zrodil v Evropě během druhé poloviny devatenáctého století a v Americe zažíval svůj vrchol v období kolem první světové války. Ač je za kolébku naturalismu pokládána Francie, stal se tento směr naprosto

nepostradatelným pro americkou literaturu dvacátého století. Naturalismus se řídí Darwinovou teorií přežití nejsilnějšího jedince a může být charakterizován i jako marný lidský boj proti vůli osudu. Spisovatelé následující tento směr se ve svých dílech orientovali především na popis každodenního života nejnižší společenské vrstvy a krutých podmínek. Zabývali se podrobným vykreslením života ve slumech, vykořisťování nejchudších dělníků a afroamerických obyvatel a jejich naprosté bezmoci proti vůli nejmajetnější vrstvy. Hlavní postavy románů musí s nelehkým životním osudem bojovat, zatímco autor zachovává odstup a pozici jakéhosi pozorovatele, který se snaží co nejdříve zdokumentovat realitu.

Naturalismus spojuje i dvě díla, která jsou zvolena k analýze a k porovnání společných prvků. Prvním z nich je *The Jungle* od Uptona Sinclaira. Upton Beall Sinclair se narodil roku 1878 v Baltimoru, ve státě Maryland. Po dokončení studia na Universitě se začal věnovat psaní, ale největší vliv na jeho dílo měla návštěva jatek ve městě *Packingtown*, která mimo jiné zásobovala armádu zkaženým masem během španělsko-americké války. Zde měl shromažďovat informace a pozorovat nekalé praktiky. Takovýchto investigativních spisovatelů či novinářů byla zejména v Chicagu celá řada, a nazývali se *Muckrakers*. Tyto zkušenosti a odhalení skutečností vedly k vzniku románu *The Jungle*, který se zabývá životem a osudy rodiny litevských přistěhovalců, svádějících každodenní boj s krutými podmínkami zaměstnání a živobytí. Ústřední postavou je Jurgis, který se svou rodinou přijíždí do Spojených států s vidinou lepší budoucnosti. V honbě za tzv. „Americkým snem“ se ale setkává s řadou obtíží a jeho počáteční optimismus se rychle vytrácí. Postupně přichází o zaměstnání, není schopen zabezpečit rodinu a uchyluje se k alkoholu.

Druhý román napsal Richard Wright a jmenuje se *Native Son*. Richard Wright se narodil v malém městečku ve státě Mississippi roku 1908 do velmi chudé afroamerické rodiny. Když dospěl, odstěhoval se do Chicaga, aby se vymanil z jižanského vlivu a mohl se stát spisovatelem. Jeho cílem bylo popsat složitý život afroamerických rodin, nerovné šance a nečestné zacházení s nimi. V tomto ohledu důvěřoval komunistickému hnutí, které se jako jediné snaží s touto situací účinně bojovat. Když vydal roku 1940 knihu *Native Son*, setkala se okamžitě s obrovským úspěchem, stala se bestsellerem, a Wright se díky ní stal uznávaným spisovatelem. V tomto díle je ústřední postavou Bigger Thomas, chudý a nevzdělaný afro-americký chlapec, který se nechá zaměstnat

jako šofér v zámožné rodině Daltonových. Události nabírají rychlý spád poté, co Bigger nešťastnou náhodou usmrtí mladou dceru Daltonových, která s ním paradoxně jako jediná sympatizovala a chtěla jeho skutečný život poznat. Bigger se snaží unikat spravedlnosti, ale nakonec je zatčen a v cele smrti přemýšlí nad svým konáním a celým životem. Motivem celého románu je v podstatě fakt, že „bílí vládou černým“, a ačkoliv toto může vyznít politicky nekorektně, v knize autorovi nečiní problém popisovat skutečnosti bez jakýchkoliv ohledů.

Oba autoři se vyznačují společným literárním žánrem, ale pokud se jedná o jejich politické přesvědčení, to se poněkud liší. Ačkoli oba byli značně ovlivněni levicovými myšlenkami, jakožto zastánci utlačovaných nižších tříd, Wright byl zastáncem komunismu a Sinclair spíše socialismu. Oba analyzované romány poskytují pohled na reálný obraz města vkomponovaný do příběhů hrdinů těchto děl, a takto nepřímou poukazují na nespravedlivé jednání vůči národnostním a etnickým menšinám. Jedním ze společných prvků těchto děl je sklon k alkoholismu, ačkoliv v každém k němu vede jiný důvod. Jurgis je nepříznivými životními podmínkami nucen uchýlovat se do barů, aby se po těžké práci ohřál a mohl tak alespoň určitou část dne či noci přečkat v teple. Oproti tomu Bigger sahá k alkoholu, protože se snaží zapomenout na realitu, každodenní starosti a popíjením se uvolnit ze stresu.

Rasismus je fenomén, který taktéž provází obě knihy. Etnický původ Biggera Thomase je evidentní po fyzické stránce, a tento fakt ho v podstatě předurčuje k nesnadnému životu. On se ale příliš nesnaží cokoli změnit, nevyužívá možnosti vzdělání, a díky náhodě získá své zaměstnání. Paradoxem je, že zámožný pan Dalton vlastní ubytovny pro nejchudší afroamerické rodiny a má tudíž obrovský zisk z předraženého nájemného, a zároveň se chlubí svou dobročinností, když se snaží ty samé občany finančně podporovat.

Rodina litevských imigrantů je ve své honbě za tzv. „Americkým snem“ znevýhodněna jazykovou bariérou i absolutní neznalostí místních praktik. Na každém kroku se ostatní snaží zneužít jejich určité naivity a snaživosti, ať už při koupi domu či snaze zabezpečit rodinu finančně. Jurgis se snaží poctivě pracovat, vzdělávat se, ale i přesto jeho rodinu potkává jedno neštěstí za druhým. Toto vede k výrazné proměně Jurgisova charakteru a určité rezignaci nad možností svou pílí cokoli změnit.

Důsledkem toho je jeho sympatizace se socialistickými myšlenkami, neboť kapitalismus se ukázal být příčinou zničeného života celé rodiny.

Historická fakta se v obou analyzovaných dílech odrážejí s naprostou věrností. Místy kladou oba autoři důraz na velice realistický a syrový popis nelítostných praktik a situací, bez jakýchkoliv iluzí či nástinu budoucích šancí na zlepšení. Problematika obyvatel na samém okraji společnosti a jejich životní příběhy oba dva romány spojuje, ačkoliv se každý zabývá jinou utiskovanou skupinou.

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